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HOWELL COBB.

Among American statesmen, Howell Cobb will ever hold a high and honored place. Member of Congress, speaker of the National House of Representatives, Governor of Georgia, Secretary of the Treasury, and Major General in the Army of the Confederacy, and all the time one of the most trusted advisers of the people, and a leader, who never betrayed a trust. Any one can look at a picture of Gen. Cobb and be struck with the pure mind and heart shining out through his open, handsome face.

Cobb was born in Jefferson County, Georgia, on the 7th of September, 1816, the son of Col. John A. Cobb, a native of North Carolina, and his wife Sarah, who was a daughter of Thomas Reed Rootes, Esq., of Fredericksburg, Virginia, one of the most famous lawyers of the Old Dominion.

Gen. Cobb had a brother, Thomas R. R. Cobb, distinguished as a lawyer and soldier, who was killed at Fredericksburg in sight of the house in which his mother was born. It may be stated just here that Miss Mildred Rutherford, of Athens, Ga., who is now the foremost living historian of the "Lost Cause", is a niece of Gen. Cobb.

Cobb was educated at the University of Georgia. "The wonderful rapidity with which his intellect grasped any subject which engaged his attention, his unselfish nature, his generosity of disposition, his love of truth and his hatred of meanness and falsehood, were the prominent characteristics of his boyhood as they were of his maturer years", says Boykin, who wrote a life of Cobb. After his admission to the bar, he got the position of State Prosecuting Attorney of the Western District of Ga., which is the choicest gift of the gods to a young lawyer; and which has been the stepping-stone to eminence in so many great men. Here in this office are developed those traits going to make up a first-rate courthouse lawyer. Among the great men who have occupied this place are: Andrew Jackson, Chief Justice Henry McIver, of South Carolina, one of the great "Common Law" judges of America, and Stephen A. Douglas.

Cobb married in early life, Miss Mary Ann Lamar, whose fine Christian character was always an inspiration to him. In a

short while Gen. Cobb was one of the leaders of the Georgia bar, then one of the strongest in the world.

In 1842, he was elected to Congress as a member of the Democratic party. About the same time, Alexander H. Stephens and Robert Toombs went to Congress as Whigs, though they afterwards affiliated with the Democrats after the death of the Whig party, which, after all, revolved around the name and aspirations of Henry Clay.

Mr. Cobb was of the school of Jackson; was sincerely attached to the Union but was strongly opposed to any surrender of the practical rights of the States as sovereign commonwealths; was opposed to the nullification projects of Calhoun. Though but twenty-five years of age when he took his seat in Congress, Cobb was free from the outbursts of partisan rancor but strove to emphasize the national view. He was from the first a real leader on the Democratic side of the house from his ability, sound views, and fairness. The conflict which really culminated in the Civil War, really began in the closing days of the 29th Congress, when a bill was introduced appropriating two million dollars to be used in paying for any territory that might be obtained from Mexico. Then like a flash of lightning out of a clear sky happened one of the most momentous events in all history; a gentleman from Pennsylvania named Wilmot, introduced his famous proviso, which was that slavery and involuntary servitude should be prohibited in any territory acquired from Mexico. This has been called the first gun of the war and well it may be termed. The bill was killed in the Senate, but later Wilmot again introduced his famous amendment and in this debate, Cobb advocated the extension of the Missouri Compromise line and he always claimed that had the members from the South stood together, their proposition could have been carried. However, the influence of Mr. Calhoun prevented Cobb's proposition in this regard from being carried out. Much angry debating followed during the next two years.

In 1849 Calhoun issued his famous "Southern Address" in which he reviewed the aggressive and unconstitutional policy of the North and urged all the South to stand united in this crisis. The Whigs, who had just elected the President, General Taylor, then desired to allay sectional strife, and to give their candidate

a chance. While the Democrats were practically unanimous in supporting Calhoun, Cobb refused to do so along with a few others. Cobb had faith in the Northern Democrats and did not wish to throw them aside at this juncture, they having aided in the fight against the Wilmot proviso. Cobb also did not see any good in a sectional organization. His faith in the Northern Democracy never deserted him till after the Charleston convention of 1860. Cobb having been elected to the 31st Congress, was a candidate speaker.

The following, with a slight alteration is taken from the "Whig Almanac and United States Register" for 1851:

"The first session of the XXXIst Congress, which convened Nov. 3, 1849, and closed September 30th, 1850, was one of the largest and most exciting ever held. Its ten months' duration was in good part devoted to speech making, nearly the first month having been consumed by the House in ineffectual ballots for a speaker. The opposition had a small plurality in the House, with a very decided majority in the Senate, but the number of 'Free Soil Democrats' who could not vote for a speaker so thoroughly adverse as Mr. Cobb to their views of slavery extension, rendered the result doubtful, and would have secured the reelection of Mr. Winthrop, but for certain members who preferred to vote with their party on speaker without a distinct committal against the Wilmot proviso. This could not be conceded so Mr. Winthrop was steadily voted against by several pro-slavery Whigs on one side, and anti-slavery men elected by Whig votes on the other, while Mr. Cobb lost votes on one side only. Several other candidates were tried on either side with like success, though one (W. J. Brown, of Ia.) came very near an election, having succeeded in uniting both wings of the opposition upon himself by satisfying private assurances on the slavery question. The fact that such cross-eyed assurances had been given became public barely in time to prevent his election. Finally the House decided to try a plurality vote, agreeing that the highest candidate at the next ballot should be thereupon elected; and on this vote Howell Cobb of Georgia had 102 votes, Robert C. Winthrop 100 and there were 15 scattering. Howell Cobb was thereupon declared speaker by a resolution moved by Edward Stanly, Whig of North Carolina".

This election was due to the respect that fair-minded men at the North had in Cobb's character as an out-and-out Union man.

Immediately the question of the admission of California came up, she having come knocking for admission with a free soil constitution. This brought up the whole question of the admission of the acquired territory and resulted in what is known as Clay's "Compromise of 1850". On the question of the admission of Utah as a territory, it was provided that "when the said territory or any portion of the same shall be admitted as a State, it shall be received into the Union, with or without slavery, as their constitution may prescribe at the time of her admission". Cobb assisted in getting together a conference of the leaders on both sides and they agreed on the principle of congressional noninterference, and Clay's compromise was merely this principle enacted in the above words. There was a bitter fight but the matter went through largely as a result of the influence of Cobb as speaker of the House. The upshot of the whole matter was that the extremists on both sides were displeased and thought that they had been sold out. A bitter fight was made against Cobb in Georgia and in order that he might bring the matter before the people of the whole State, ran for Governor and carried the fight into every county and won by a good margin. At this late day, Cobb's enemies raised a clamor for the extension of the old Missouri Compromise line but Cobb arraigned them severely for their belated support of his old plan, the time for which had long since past. To quote his words:

"If they had united with me at the proper time, we could have obtained that line as the basis of settlement, but Mr. Calhoun said, the South was sick of compromises and demanded the constitutional principle of noninterference. Well now noninterference is tendered and is to be rejected on the ground that the heretofore repudiated Missouri Compromise is preferable".

(It may be stated that Mr. Calhoun had died in the early stages of the fight and the South was now without his sage counsel.) Cobb in the meantime in a state paper of great power had issued a masterly argument for the compromise. It may be stated that in this fight Cobb had the support of those two other great Georgians, Toombs and Stephens. At this time Cobb took the position that the right to secede was not given by the Constitu-

tion but held that any people had a right to revolution when their social existence was in jeopardy. To quote:

"The right of a State to secede in case of oppression or a gross and palpable violation of her constitutional rights, I am prepared to recognize. In such case each State, in the language of the Kentucky and Virginia Revolution of 1798-9, is to be the judge, not only of the infractions but of the mode of redress. It is the just right of the people to change their form of government when in their opinion it has become tyrannical, in a mode not provided for in the Constitution, and is therefore revolutionary in its character and depends for its maintenance upon the stout hearts and strong arms of a free people".

I have gone into Cobb's views at this time to show that the Cobb of 1850 who was a Union man, was the same Cobb who in 1860 advocated secession, for it is conceded on all hands that he was the efficient force that caused Georgia to secede and along with it many other Southern States. He thought in 1850 that the North would respect the Constitution and was for the Union; he thought in 1860 that the North would not respect the Constitution and was for pulling loose from the North in order to protect ourselves. In other words, he saw our nation in flames and was simply in favor of moving out of a burning house.

To resume the narrative: Cobb made an excellent governor and tried to unite all the Union men in the support of General Pierce in 1852, but Toombs and Stevens and the other Whigs brought out Webster and the extreme fire-eaters would have nothing of Cobb and his Union party and Cobb went into a state of political eclipse. He was sent to Congress in 1855 and was later made a member of Buchanan's cabinet, being for a while the real leader, in that body but a few months before the President went out of office, Cobb resigned his place, seeing as he thought, all chance for harmony gone, and he prepared to get out of the Union in order to protect our beloved Southland. When the convention of the seceded States met in Montgomery, Ala., Cobb was chosen as president of that body; afterward went into the active conflict in the military service, retaining the presidency of Congress till the Davis administration got under way. Cobb took part in many hard-fought battles, always with great

gallantry, finally being assigned to the district of Florida with the rank of Major General.

After the surrender he was put under arrest for a short while but was released and began the practice of law at Macon, Ga., making a great success in this field.

However, in October, 1868, he died suddenly in New York City, while engaged in conversation with his wife and a friend from Georgia—Bishop Beckwith. Cobb was a great orator, a superb lawyer, a man of large means, and as fine a character in his personal relations as ever walked American soil—loving, kind, charitable and sincere. He had as fine a face as ever man carried, and was loved by all who came within the sphere of his personal influence.

But after all it is as a statesman that we must judge him and history from the Southern view point must rate him as the peer of Calhoun; and I am sure that a fair-minded posterity will accord him that justice that his great intellect, pure heart and great patriotism have so well earned.

C. J. RAMAGE.

Saluda, S. C.